



Congresswoman Stephanie Murphy
Remarks as Prepared for Delivery
Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War
Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post 8207
Longwood, FL
September 11, 2018

Good morning. My name is Congresswoman Stephanie Murphy. I'm so honored and humbled to be in your presence. Thank you for being here. And thank you for everything you have done to defend this land we love.

In a few moments, I will present the Vietnam veterans in attendance—or their surviving family members—with a special pin to recognize your service and sacrifice.

It's fitting that we are holding this ceremony on the 17th anniversary of the terrorist attacks of September 11th. It was a tragic day filled with loss, but also a day that unified our nation and deepened our appreciation for the men and women in our military.

Before I present you with your lapel pin, I hope you will indulge me as I say a few words about why this ceremony is so important, both for our country and for me personally.

I want to begin, however, by paying my respect to your comrades-in-arms and your loved ones who did not live to see this day.

That includes the soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines who lost their lives in Vietnam, thousands of miles from home.

It also includes those service members who survived the war, some with visible or invisible scars, but who passed away in the years that followed. Too many of these warriors left this earth without being appropriately honored for their patriotic service, and that is a shame.

Those of you who served in uniform may be thinking about your fallen friends right now. I know that friendships formed in the military—especially friendships forged in the crucible of combat—are uniquely deep and intense.

Those of you who are here on behalf of a late spouse, or parent, or other family member who served our country are no doubt thinking about your loved one, and missing them terribly.

I know that you carry the memories of those you lost in your hearts every day, but particularly on days like this, where deep pride can mix with deep sadness.

So I join you in paying tribute to the Vietnam veterans you loved who are not here with us today, but who will never be forgotten. Not by you, and not by the nation they served so well.

Now, let me underscore why this ceremony—and similar ceremonies being held around the country to commemorate the Vietnam War and to recognize the Americans who served during that period—are so important for our nation.

As a general matter, I think you'll agree that America has a tradition of expressing appreciation for the men and women who took up arms for this country in times of conflict.

We saw it clearly after World War II, when the heroes of Normandy Beach and Iwo Jima were welcomed home by a grateful nation, which celebrated their victories and venerated their sacrifices.

Thankfully, we have witnessed it again in the years since 9/11. By and large, men and women who served in Afghanistan, Iraq, and other conflict zones are shown respect and even reverence by the American public—which is precisely as it should be.

Too often, the treatment of Vietnam veterans represented a deviation from this tradition. In retrospect, it seems clear that some members of the public who doubted the wisdom of America's involvement in Vietnam did not properly distinguish between the war itself and the warriors who volunteered or were drafted to serve in it. As a result, too many of you and your fellow service members were treated in dishonorable ways you did not deserve.

This ceremony, belated though it may be, is designed as a corrective, an effort to make sure you know how much your service and sacrifice are appreciated. No politics. No debates about foreign policy. Just a simple expression of gratitude for men and women who put it all on the line when their country called. And who, once their time in the service was over, fought so hard to make sure that veterans of their generation, and future generations, would be treated in a fair and dignified manner.

Now, in order to explain why this ceremony means so much to me personally, I'd like to tell you a short story—and, again, I hope you'll indulge me.

I was born in Vietnam in 1978, several years after the war had ended. As you know, a communist government had taken power, and it was determined to punish those who had worked alongside American and South Vietnamese forces during the war. Both of my parents fell into that category.

When I was a baby, and my brother was eight, my dad and mom concluded that a difficult situation had become intolerable. They wanted us to live in a place where we would be safe, where we

would have freedom and dignity, and where we would have the opportunity for a better life—and they didn't think any of that was possible in Vietnam.

So we fled Vietnam in a small boat in the dead of night with other families. Several days into our journey, our boat ran out of fuel in the middle of the South China Sea. We sent out an emergency call and began to drift dangerously.

Thanks to grace or good fortune, a U.S. Navy ship patrolling in the area received our distress signal and located our boat. The sailors onboard, all of them trained for combat, showed compassion for desperate strangers. They gave us the fuel and supplies we needed to reach a Malaysian refugee camp. From there, we would make the passage to the United States and become proud American citizens. And now—decades later—I stand in front of you, the first Vietnamese-American woman elected to Congress.

The moment the U.S. Navy rescued my family was the moment that made the rest of my life possible. Although I was too young to realize it at the time, this was also my introduction to America's uniquely wonderful combination of power and generosity, which is perhaps best embodied by the American military—a force for good in a chaotic and often cruel world.

As you can imagine, when I meet veterans, and especially Vietnam veterans like you, I feel an overwhelming sense of gratitude. I felt it last year when I had the privilege to travel to Vietnam with the late, great Senator John McCain and to tour the prison where he showed such courage and character.

There are no simply no words I can say to adequately thank you, and no actions I can take to fully repay the debt of gratitude I owe you. But I'll never stop trying.

Now, on behalf of the country you served, I am so happy to present you with your lapel pin.

On the front of the pin is an eagle, representing your courage, honor, and dedicated service. On the back is a simple message: "A grateful nation thanks and honors you."

May God bless you. And may God bless the United States of America.